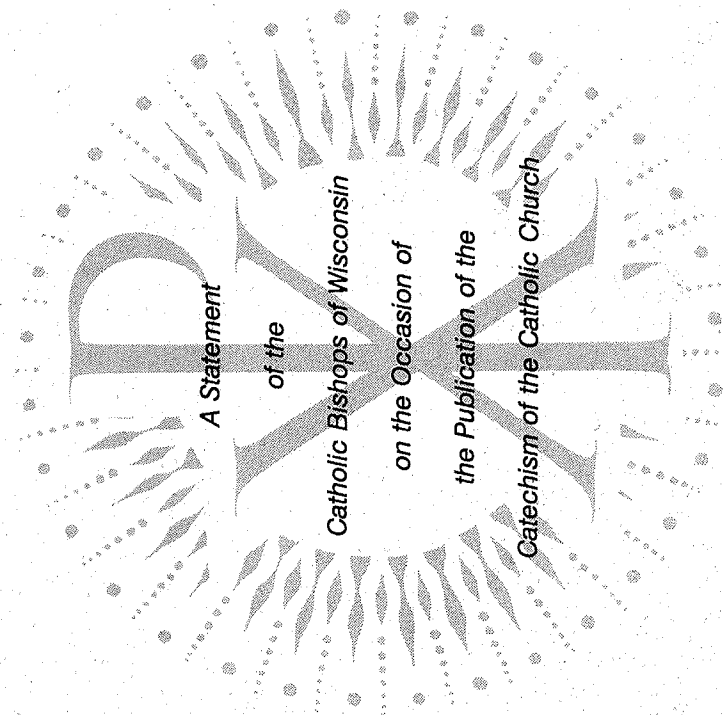


DISCIPLESHIP FROM AGE TO AGE:

A CALL FOR RENEWAL

IN

CATECHESIS



September 18, 1994

STATEMENT AND REFLECTION TOOL

STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Every new generation is a gift to the Church. It is a gift which invites the Church ever deeper into her mission of proclaiming the good news and making the Kingdom of God present. It is a gift which challenges the Church of every age to reflect upon and apply once again the heart and soul of the tradition that defines her identity. It is a gift which offers the Church ever-new opportunities to make the message of the gospel come alive in the hearts and minds of believers.

The message of the gospel is important for every age, but it is more urgent today than perhaps ever before in the history of humanity. It is a message of hope in the face of unprecedented frustration and despair; it is a promise of peace in the midst of unending conflict; it is a word of wisdom which discerns truth in today's marketplace of ideas; it is a covenant of love in a world where anger and hate claim too much energy.

CATECHESIS AND THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The publication of the English edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is a grace-filled moment, a truly exceptional one that has blessed our own time. It presents us with an extraordinary opportunity and challenge to renew our efforts in catechesis and to focus our energies once again on the important work of proclaiming the good news and making the Kingdom of God present to this generation.

THE PLACE OF CATECHESIS IN THE MISSION OF THE PARISH

A parish's catechetical ministry lies at the very heart of its mission. The mission of the parish is the mission of Christ: to form a people for God, to make disciples of all nations, to establish peace and justice among all peoples. The parish accomplishes this mission

through its many ministries, but especially through evangelization, liturgy, prayer and catechesis. Evangelization is the proclamation, the invitation to come to and join in the community of believers, and to continually deepen one's faith. Liturgy is the profession and celebration in community of the faith. Catechesis is the growth, the development, the nourishment of the faith. If a parish is to be truly viable, it must have an active vibrant catechetical program. Catechesis is foundational to the mission of the parish.

THE GOAL OF CATECHESIS: DISCIPLESHIP

The goal of all catechetical efforts, in the words of the "Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church," is to make a person's "faith become living, conscious and active through the light of instruction."

Catechesis is a life-long process, beginning on the day of our birth and culminating on the day of our rebirth in heaven. Only a living, conscious and active faith can shape our thoughts, guide our actions as we respond to all the conflicting messages in contemporary culture, and bring us in the end to eternal peace and happiness with God. In a word, the goal of catechesis is mature discipleship. To be a disciple of Christ is to welcome the gift of faith: to believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the pattern of our own existence. To be a disciple of Christ is to gather with the community in prayer: to give praise and glory to God in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. To be a disciple of Christ is to live the commands of the gospel: to minister to one another in community, to be a force for establishing a more just society, to give witness to the saving presence of God in the family, the neighborhood, the workplace, indeed throughout the whole world.

THE CONTEXT OF CATECHESIS: INSTRUCTION AND EXPERIENCE

Catechesis is accomplished in two complementary ways: through

systematic instruction and through the experience of the faith community. A parish's catechetical ministry, be it the religious education program (CCD), the Catholic school, or adult religious education, must provide quality systematic instruction in the teachings of the Church for persons at all levels, from early childhood through adulthood. All Catholics should be able to articulate the basic beliefs of the faith in a way that is appropriate to their age level. They should be able to understand the basic doctrines of the faith, why the Church teaches what it teaches, and what significance these teachings have for their own lives. A parish's catechetical ministry must also provide opportunities for all persons to recognize the sacred in life-experiences. What is taught must be lived. Life-experiences are catechetical moments. Everything a parish does, its liturgical celebrations, its social outreach, its various ministries, even its day-to-day operations, is a powerful witness to the saving presence of Christ in the world.

THE MINISTERS OF CATECHESIS: A PARTNERSHIP

There is no question that parents exercise the primary influence on the faith formation of their children. The family setting more than anywhere else is the place where faith formation takes place. Devotional and ritual practices, attitudes of respect and reverence, moral and ethical convictions: these are "caught" more than "taught" by everything children experience every day in the home. Responsibility for catechesis however extends beyond the home and the family. All Catholics need to see themselves as catechists, sharing the faith by their example, their interest and their support. A parish needs to see itself as a catechizing community, some members of which have special tasks. Catechists and teachers of formal religious education programs have the responsibility to prepare themselves to teach effectively. Those responsible for administering educational programs, Directors of Religious Education programs and school principals, have the responsibility of securing the most competent catechists and teachers available, and providing the necessary training and materials for them to do their work effectively. The pastor, as the chief catechist in the parish, has the obligation not only to oversee the catechetical

program, but also to be intimately involved in every aspect of its operation. Only when catechesis is seen as a partnership will it effectively accomplish its goal.

THE CALL FOR RENEWAL AND REDEDICATION TO CATECHESIS

As the English edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is published, the Catholic bishops in the State of Wisconsin call for a renewal of catechesis in every Catholic parish in the state. As the chief catechists of our dioceses, we urge each parish to reflect deeply upon its catechetical mission and ministry.

- 1) Each parish should review its catechetical goals.
- 2) Each parish should evaluate the effectiveness of its catechetical programs.
- 3) Each parish should renew its dedication and resolve to provide the highest quality catechesis.
- 4) Each parish should put forth its best efforts to provide ongoing Christian formation for each person in the parish.
- 5) Each parish should resolve to make full use of all the catechetical resources its diocese has to offer.

The need for a renewal in catechesis is great; the hearts of believers are open; the time is now.

"May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant you a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly. May he enlighten your innermost vision that you may know the great hope to which he has called you, the wealth of his glorious heritage to be distributed among the members of the Church, and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe." [Eph. 1:17-19]

REFLECTION TOOL

Discipleship From Age To Age: A Call For Renewal In Catechesis is both a gift and an opportunity. The statement is a gift to the Catholic community of Wisconsin because it offers clear principles by which relevant and effective catechesis can be accomplished. It is an opportunity through which the Catholic community can review and strengthen its commitment to the life-long catechetical mission of the parish.

This statement and its reflection tool are addressed to all Catholics, but it will be particularly helpful when used by such groups as the pastoral council, the education commission and parish staff to review the catechetical efforts of the parish.

The reflection tool presumes that one has read the entire statement. The tool invites the readers:

- to **focus** on a particular paragraph under each principle; (Each paragraph is accompanied by complementary statements of the church.)
- to **react** to the key concept of the focus;
- to **review** the catechetical accomplishments of their own parish;
- to **discuss** the key principle;
- to **offer recommendations** for renewing and strengthening the catechetical efforts of their parish.

Use of this reflection tool is one way by which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can begin to have a significant impact on a parish catechetical program.

PRINCIPAL ONE

Catechesis is a foundational ministry of the parish.

FOCUS

"A parish's catechetical ministry lies at the very heart of its mission. The mission of the parish is the mission of Christ: to form a people for God, to make disciples of all nations. . . . Catechesis is the growth, the development, the nourishment of the faith. If a parish is to be truly viable, it must have an active vibrant catechetical program. Catechesis is foundational."

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin, Discipleship from Age to Age

"The more the Church . . . gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings, . . . the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Church is bidden by God and events — each of them a call from him — to renew her trust in catechetical activity as a prime aspect of her mission. She is bidden to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means, in order to organize it better and to train qualified personnel."

John Paul II: On Catechesis in Our Time

"One of the primary tasks for the Catholics of the Diocese of Madison is to work together in parish communities to foster mature faith. We know that faith is a gift from God. As we receive this gift, we also accept the responsibility to cherish and nurture it. Parishes do this most effectively when they dedicate themselves to building and sustaining a strong catechetical program for all their members."

Bishop Bullock

REACTION

Are there any parts of these statements with which you strongly agree or disagree?

REVIEWING YOUR PARISH CATECHETICAL EFFORTS

Review (together) each of the following characteristics of a parish which describe catechesis as a foundational ministry of the parish. Before you

assign a number value to a statement make a mental list of the ways your parish does or does not satisfy each statement. Then rate the presence of these characteristics in your own parish on a scale of 1 (= poor) to 5 (= excellent).

_____ Our parish identifies catechetical ministry as one of its major priorities.

_____ Our parish has a catechetical board/committee with a clearly defined statement of purpose.

_____ Our parish's long range planning includes goals, objectives and strategies which will assure a relevant and effective catechetical ministry.

_____ Our parish's commitment to the priority of catechetical ministry is clearly reflected in the budget.

_____ Our parish is committed to the certification and training of all personnel who have any responsibility for catechesis (i.e., DRE's, Principals, CRE's, catechists, teachers).

_____ Our parish provides adequate space and facilities for its catechetical programs and classes.

_____ (if your parish has a school) Our school leadership and the parents of the school children consider formation in discipleship one of the school's primary responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does the above focus and review challenge your understanding of your parish's commitment to assure the priority of catechesis?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this sections review and discussion, what recommendations would you offer which would contribute to establishing the priority of your parish's catechetical ministry?

PRINCIPLE TWO

The goal of catechesis is discipleship.

FOCUS

"To be a disciple of Jesus is to welcome the gift of faith: to believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the pattern of your existence. To be a disciple of Jesus is to gather with the community in prayer: to give praise and glory to God in celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. To be a disciple of Jesus is to live the commands of the Gospel: to minister to one another in community, to be a force for establishing a more just society, to give witness to the saving presence of God in the family, the neighborhood, the workplace, indeed throughout the whole world."

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin, Discipleship from Age to Age

"Every form of catechesis is oriented in some way toward the catechesis of adults, who are capable of a full response to God's Word. Catechesis is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant, concerted pastoral activity of the Christian community."

NCCB, Sharing the Light of Faith, #32

"God calls us as disciples of Christ to personally appropriate His Word in our lives in a way that His Word informs our minds and motivates our hearts. Thus, we become His clear witnesses in all we say and do. This is our noble and true vocation as disciples."

Bishop Bullock

REACTION

Are there any parts of these statements with which you strongly agree or disagree?

REVIEWING YOUR PARISH CATECHETICAL EFFORTS

Review (together) each of the following characteristics of a parish which describe discipleship as the goal of catechesis. Before you assign a number value to a statement make a mental list of the ways your parish does or does not satisfy each statement. Then rate the presence of these characteristics in your own parish on a scale of 1 (=poor) to 5 (=excellent).

Our parish understands that it is called to be a visible community of Jesus' disciples who are missioned to proclaim and live out the Gospel.

Our parish encourages a committed relationship with Jesus who is "the pattern of our existence."

Our parish continually invites and teaches its members to be a people of prayer and sacramental celebration.

Our parish fosters a dedication to both understand and live the word of God.

Our parish encourages its members to offer themselves in service to one another, the local community and the community beyond our immediate local boundaries.

Our parish community is dedicated to 1) understand, 2) live and 3) give voice to a life that is moral and just.

Our parish encourages its members to give witness, in word and deed, to the saving love of God not only within our families but within every situation in which we find ourselves.

Our parish's catechetical efforts include children but, like Jesus, focuses its primary attention on fostering mature faith among adults.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does the above focus and review challenge your understanding of your parish's commitment to foster discipleship?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this section's review and discussion, what recommendations would contribute to improving your parish's efforts of fostering discipleship?

PRINCIPLE THREE

The context of catechesis includes systematic formal instruction.

FOCUS

"A parish's catechetical ministry, be it the Religious Education program, (CCD), the Catholic school, or adult education, must provide quality systematic instruction in the teachings of the Church to persons at all levels, early childhood through adulthood. All Catholics should be able to articulate the basic beliefs of the faith in a way that is appropriate to their age level. They should be able to understand what the Church teaches, why it teaches what it teaches, and what significance it has for their own lives."

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin, Discipleship from Age to Age

"Effective catechesis takes into account the fact that (the child's) comprehension and other powers develop gradually. Religious truths are presented in greater depth, and more mature challenges are proposed as the capacity for understanding and growth in faith increases."

NCCB, Sharing the Light of Faith, #181, Guideline 4

"Every Catholic has a right to an organic and systematic instruction in the faith. Such instruction, while always being age-appropriate, must not only inform the mind and nourish the soul, but also change the heart."

Bishop Bullock

REACTION

Are there any parts of these statements with which you strongly agree or disagree?

REVIEWING YOUR PARISH CATECHETICAL EFFORTS

Review (together) each of the following characteristics of a parish which describe a commitment to systematic formal instruction. Before you assign a number value to a statement make a mental list of the ways your parish does or does not satisfy each statement. Then rate the presence of these characteristics in your own parish on a scale of 1 (= poor) to 5 (= excellent).

_____ Our parish's catechetical ministry employs a Director/Coordinator of Religious Education who is properly certified and trained in keeping with the requirements of the local diocese and the Wisconsin Catholic Conference.

_____ Our parish catechists and/or teachers are encouraged to pursue continuing religious education in the areas of Scripture, theology, spirituality and methodology.

_____ Our parish catechists' and/or teachers' performance and certification are reviewed annually.

_____ Our parish's catechetical programs have a clearly written statement of goals and objectives at each grade level and for adult education.

_____ Our parish's catechetical program is comprehensive, and age-appropriate, embracing all of the essential elements of our faith and tradition: Scripture, the creed, sacraments, morality, spirituality and service.

_____ Each grade level in our parish catechetical program integrates an ever-deepening understanding of Sacred Scripture.

_____ Over the course of our parish catechetical program, the key teachings of the Church as expressed in the creed and outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church are presented and adequately grasped by the students.

_____ Over the course of our parish catechetical program, students are prepared to celebrate the appropriate sacraments, and an understanding of the other sacraments is taught.

Over the course of our parish catechetical program, students are taught the importance of the Ten Commandments and how they relate to their lives.

Our parish's catechetical program provides an adequate number of sessions at each age level to achieve our stated goals and objectives for that level.

Our parish's catechetical program enables participants to articulate what the Church believes and what impact the Church teachings have on their own lives.

Our parish's catechetical instruction is available to a diversity of people which include adults (both young and old), and people with special needs (such as physically or developmentally handicapped).

Our parish provides adequate facilities, materials, and funding to insure quality formal instruction.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does the above focus and review challenge your understanding of your parish's commitment of systematic formal instruction at all age and ability levels?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this section's review and discussion, what recommendations would you offer which would contribute to the relevant and effective catechetical instruction in your parish?

PRINCIPLE FOUR

The context of catechesis is experiential.

FOCUS

"A parish's catechetical ministry must also provide opportunities for all persons to experience faith in action. What is taught must be experienced at every opportunity in the family and in the parish community. Everything a parish does, its liturgical celebrations, its social outreach, its various ministries, even its day-to-day operations, is a powerful witness to . . . the saving presence of Christ in the world.

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin, Discipleship from Age to Age

"Experience is of great importance in catechesis. Experiential learning, which can be considered a form of inductive methodology, gives rise to concerns and questions, hopes and anxieties, reflections and judgments, which increase one's desire to penetrate more deeply into life's meaning. Experience can also increase the intelligibility of the Christian message, by providing illustrations and examples which shed light on the truths of revelation. At the same time, experience itself should be interpreted in the light of revelation.

"The experiential approach is not easy, but it can be of considerable value to catechesis. Catechists should encourage people to reflect on their significant experiences and respond to God's presence there . . . They should seek to reach the whole person, using both cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) techniques."

NCCB, Sharing the Light of Faith, # 176

"God is present to us in His Word, in Sacrament and in community. He dwells within us and as we live our lives daily, we experience God in others, in family, friends, at work and play. These are the everyday times and places where we meet God."

Bishop Bullock

REACTION

Are there any parts of these statements with which you strongly agree or disagree?

REVIEWING YOUR PARISH CATECHETICAL EFFORTS

Review (together) each of the following characteristics of a parish which describe a commitment to experiential learning. Before you assign a number value to a statement make a mental list of the ways your parish does or does not satisfy each statement. Then rate the presence of these characteristics in your own parish on a scale of 1 (= poor) to 5 (= excellent).

Our parish's catechetical ministry is dedicated to finding ways to invite both adults and youth to recognize the fact that daily experiences at home, work, school, recreation, etc. can be moments of revelation which enable them to more deeply appreciate the love and mercy of God.

Our parish's catechetical ministry not only teaches through formal instruction but challenges us to live that which we have come to know.

Our parish's catechetical ministry encourages our adults and youth to participate in retreats, days of renewal, spiritual reflection, prayer and reception of the sacraments.

Our parish's catechetical ministry in conjunction with pastor and the parish leadership have stressed that all parish ministries and activities have a direct relationship to catechesis and play an important role in nurturing faith in adults and youth.

Our parish's catechetical ministry has effectively explained to parents and guardians that it is primarily through their influence and example, rather than sole reliance on a religious education program, that their children will come to know, love and serve God.

Our parish's catechetical ministry is friendly, hospitable and welcoming.

Our parish regularly provides opportunities for children and youth to participate in the parish's liturgical celebrations, ministries and social activities.

Our parish is noted for its hospitality, its commitment to the needy and alienated, its works of reconciliation, healing and peace-making, and its pursuit of justice for the oppressed.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does the above focus and review challenge your understanding of the importance of "the experiential" in the faith formation of adults and youth?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this section's review and discussion what recommendations would you offer which could improve the experiential approach to nourishing faith?

PRINCIPLE FIVE

Catechetical ministry is a partnership.

FOCUS

"All Catholics need to see themselves as catechists, sharing the faith by their example, their interest and their support. A parish needs to see itself as a catechizing community, some members of which have special tasks. Catechists and teachers of formal religious education programs have the responsibility to prepare themselves to teach effectively. Those responsible for administering educational programs (Directors of Religious Education programs and school principals) have the responsibility of securing the most competent catechists and teachers available, and providing the necessary training and materials for them to do their work effectively. The pastor, as the chief catechist in the parish, has the obligation not only to oversee the catechetical program, but also to be intimately involved in every aspect of its operation. Only when catechesis is seen as a partnership will it effectively accomplish its goal."

The Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin, Discipleship from Age to Age

"All members of a community of believers are called to share in the ministry (of catechesis) by being witnesses to the faith. Some, however, are called to more specific catechetical roles. Parents, teachers and principals in Catholic schools, parish catechists, coordinators or directors of religious education, those who work in diocesan and national offices, deacons, priests and bishops — all are catechists with distinct roles."

NCCB, Sharing the Light of Faith, #204

"Teaching and being taught, listening and learning together must be our position together because if you set aside the teaching office of Bishop and Church and circumvent the norms and teaching of the Church, or if I don't listen and learn from you and set you aside, then why should those whom we teach pay attention to either of us? Together in Christ we can foster a mature faith in respect and mutual trust by teaching, listening and learning at all levels."

Bishop Bullock: Address to Educators, 10-15-93

REACTION

Are there any parts of these statements with which you strongly agree or disagree?

REVIEWING YOUR PARISH CATECHETICAL EFFORTS

Review (together) each of the following characteristics of a parish which describe the catechetical ministry as a partnership. Before you assign a number value to a statement make a mental list of the ways your parish does or does not satisfy each statement. Then rate the presence of these characteristics in your own parish on a scale of 1 (= poor) to 5 (= excellent).

_____ All of our parish members see themselves as catechists, sharing the faith by their example, their interest and their support.

_____ Our parish's catechetical ministry regularly encourages and assists parents and guardians in recognizing practical ways they can foster the faith development of their children in their home.

_____ Our parish has a well developed family ministry program.

_____ Our parish catechetical ministry attracts the most competent catechists and teachers available.

_____ Our pastor and associate pastor(s) are significantly involved in our catechetical ministry.

_____ (If the parish has a school) There is close cooperation between the school administrators/teachers and the religious education administrators/catechists.

_____ Individual interest groups in our parish maintain focus on the larger purpose of the parish as a community of disciples, rather than pursuing goals in isolation from or in competition with one another.

DISCUSSION

In what ways does the above focus and review challenge your understanding of the cooperation needed by the entire parish in order to assure a relevant and effective catechetical ministry?

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this section's review and discussion what recommendations would you offer which could help parish members better understand their role as partners in the catechetical ministry?